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Students Serve Inner-City Youth of Dayton

CEDARVILLE, OHIO – According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 14.8 percent of people are living in poverty in the United States. In the Dayton region, however, the rate is astronomically higher at 34.7 percent.

But Dayton-based The Gospel Mission, along with the help of several Cedarville University students, is helping to meet the physical and spiritual needs of those in need.

Jenna Parker, a senior social work major from Williamson, NY, and Ashley Belles, a junior psychology major from Webster, NY, have spent several years helping at The Gospel Mission. A comprehensive inner-city mission located near the heart of downtown Dayton, the mission is open to men and women, young and old, of any race, faith or circumstance.

The Gospel Mission focuses primarily on serving the poor and needy. They offer clothing, daily meals, chapel sessions and weekly Bible studies.

Part of The Gospel Mission's ministry is an after-school youth program that gives at-risk children a place to receive tutoring and enjoy extracurricular activities. Parker and Belles volunteer at the youth center twice a week, and both agree that their time volunteering with the children has been life changing.

"The ministry has been the most impactful part of my time at Cedarville," said Parker. "It's amazing to see the growth in relationships. The kids love in a very raw way. There are no expectations on credentials. It's just a meeting of people. You don't see this openness in many people. There's a lot of unconditional love."

The experience has also served as an opportunity for the students to extend their "family" while making a positive impact.

"Working with these kids has changed my life," said Belles. "They've become our kids/family members. It's not about serving because we feel like we have to go. We want to go spend time with the kids."

Parker noted that it can be a challenge to break the cycle of poverty and increased involvement from more Cedarville students would go a long way toward achieving that goal. "Many of the kids come from broken homes and a lot of inconsistency," said Parker. "They don't understand the importance of education. We go in every week and see the effects of generational poverty."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 3,711 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 100 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and leading student satisfaction ratings.